

Area's immigration story spans centuries, continents

Settlers from around the world made their homes in Green Bay

BY TERRY ANDERSON

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Nothing is constant — not the land, not the forests, not the animals, and certainly not the people.

Immigration is an essential part of Our Story, which has been unfolding for the past two centuries. Among the ethnic waves that have come to the Green Bay area since the early 19th century are Native American, French, Irish, German, Dutch, Belgian, Polish, Czech, Scandinavian,

Hmong, Russian and Hispanic.

With the defeat of the British at the end of the War of 1812, Green Bay became an American territory. Several hundred American troops arrived in 1816 to solidify the hold on the frontier outpost, and they began construction of a log fortress on the west bank of the Fox River (Dousman and Museum Place), which would be named Fort Howard, in honor of General Benjamin Howard, a hero of the War of 1812.

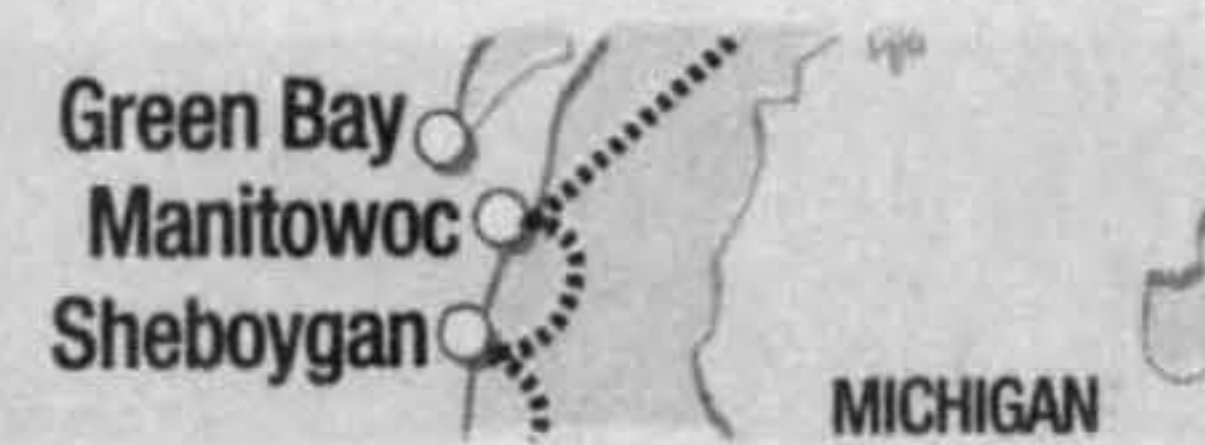
With establishment of a permanent military presence serving as hub of the community came Yankee entrepreneurs who diversified beyond the fur trade. Among them:

■ **Daniel Whitney:** Arrived in

1819 and opened a merchandise store and platted the community of Navarino where the East River met the Fox.

■ **Henry and Elizabeth Baird:** He was the first lawyer in the Wisconsin territory and is known as the Father of the Wisconsin Bar. She was a 14-year-old bride when she came here in 1824 and would live here until her death in 1890. She was a leading community figure who chronicled its growth from a rough-hewn outpost to a full-fledged city.

■ **Albert Ellis:** He came here in 1821 to be a schoolteacher, but when the school was delayed he gave up teaching to be a government surveyor. Along with J.V. Suydam in 1833 he began the Green Bay

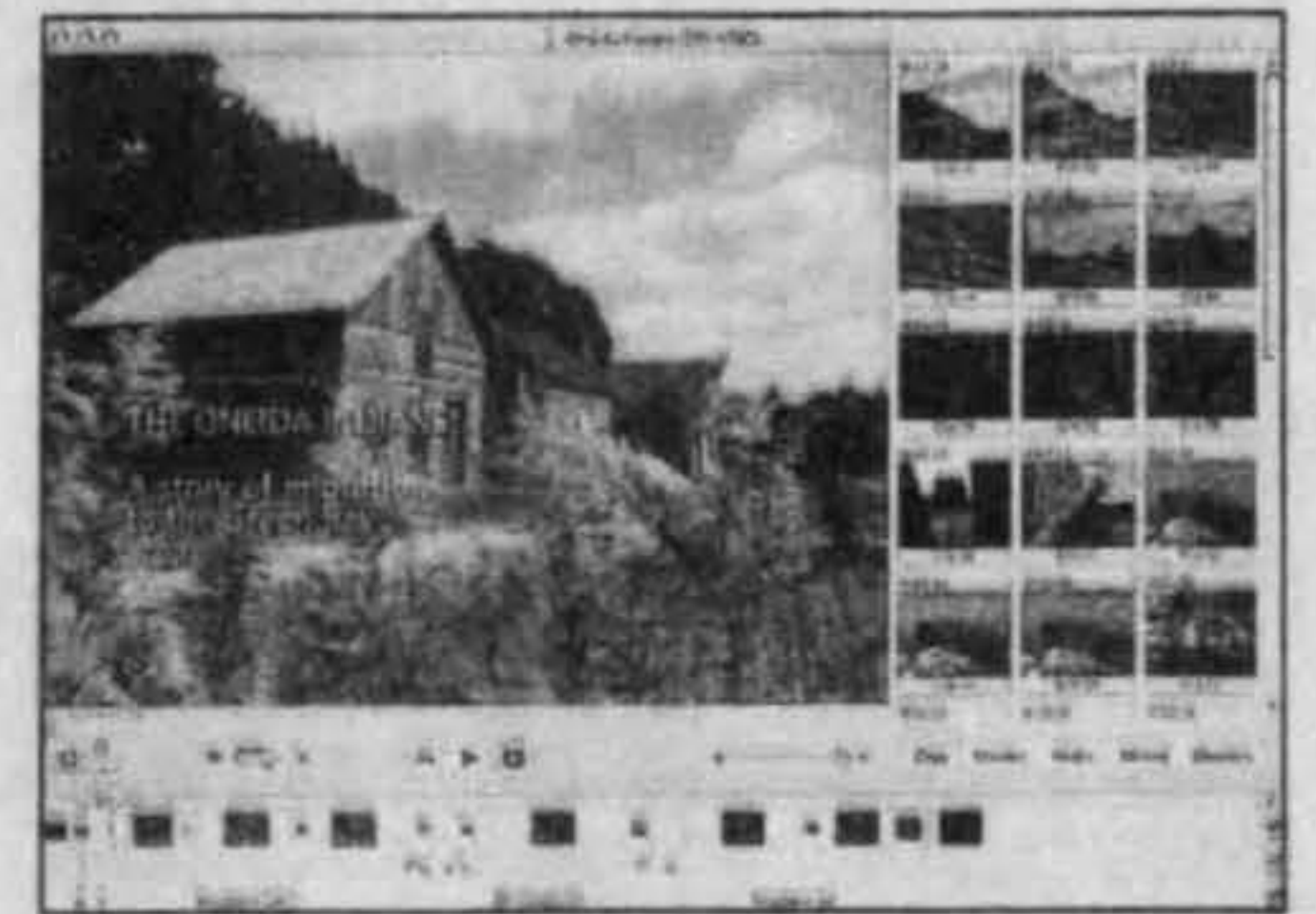


► Map shows immigrant route to Wisconsin, A-2

Intelligencer, the first newspaper in what would become the state of Wisconsin.

■ **J. P. Arndt:** Already 44 and with six children, Arndt arrived in Green Bay following the economic crash of 1815-16. He opened the first inn and tavern, established the first ferry on the Fox River, the first shipyard and the first sawmill. He also built a dam at the De Pere rapids.

► See Immigration, A-2



► Go to this story at www.greenbaypressgazette.com for a link to video in which Carol Cornelius describes the Oneida's migration to Wisconsin.

Immigration/'The draw was land and hope'

► From A-1

■ **Morgan L. Martin:** Arriving in 1827, this New York native served in the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature. In 1838 when the rival communities of Astor and Navarino merged into the borough of Green Bay he became its first president.

While the Yankee arrival began as a trickle, the first newcomers to arrive in Green Bay as an immigrant wave were the Oneida, who were rapidly being squeezed out of their homelands in central New York by encroaching settlers.

In 1822, Eleazar Williams, led what is called The First Christian Party from New York to Wisconsin. For \$5,000 the Oneidas had purchased a joint use agreement with the Menominee and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tribes.

"I would love to be a fly on the wall during those council meetings," says Carol Cornelius, who manages the Oneida Cultural Heritage Department. "Their land base was vanishing, and alcohol was destroying families. They were looking at the survival of our people."

Williams is among the most fascinating and controversial of Green Bay's early settlers.

An Episcopalian minister, he claimed to be the Lost Dauphin of France, the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, who had been spirited away from the country during the French Revolution and was raised among the Native Americans.

Historians have dismissed that claim. And to many Oneidas, Williams became a less than heroic character when they learned that he was being employed by the Ogden Land Company and the U.S. government to facilitate their removal from New York.

Even as more groups of Oneida were coming west from New York, other ethnic groups from Europe were arriving in large numbers in Wisconsin and Green Bay.

"The first wave of immigrants were from the countries around the North Sea, and they were coping with religious and ethnic persecution, revolution and increased population," says William Laatsch, professor of Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. "The draw was land and hope, my two favorite words."

At the same time, there was a push for residents to settle in what in 1848 had become the state of Wisconsin.

In 1848, a farmer named Francois Petiniot from the Belgian province of Brabant was visiting Antwerp on busi-

The route to Wisconsin

During the mid-1800s when waves of immigrants came to the Green Bay area, the journey often began in New York City. Immigrants would go by steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany, then along the Erie Canal to Buffalo. A clipper or steamship would then take them on the Great Lakes to Manitowoc, Sheboygan or Milwaukee. From there they walked.



Source: "Farewell to the Homeland," Sylvia Hall, editor

Press-Gazette



Carol Cornelius, area manager of Cultural Heritage Department, stands inside a long house at the Oneida Cultural Center on Green Bay's west side. The long house is a structure that used to house upward of four Native American families under one roof. **Corey Wilson/Press-Gazette**

ness when he came across pamphlet that described land in Wisconsin that could be purchased for \$1.25 an acre. Petiniot convinced some of his Walloon neighbors to join him in what became an exodus to Northeastern Wisconsin.

During the next four years more than 15,000 Belgians would come to the area, many settling in Green Bay and in communities north and east.

But the Belgians weren't alone. Soon there also be would be Dutch and Flemish, Germans and French, Scandinavians and Poles, Czechs and Irish.

In time Green Bay would join what Laatsch describes as the Wisconsin "sea of Germans with islands of other ethnic groups."

While many of these groups settled in ethnic communities around Northeastern Wisconsin, Green Bay became their melting pot. Most of these immigrants were Roman Catholic and much of their

cultural life centered on the church that served the ethnic community, says genealogist Kris Matthies, of N.E.W. Research Services.

For example, St. Francis Xavier Cathedral was a German church. St. Willebrord served the Dutch community. St. Peter and Paul was a Belgian Church. St. Mary's of the Angels served Polish residents. It wasn't uncommon for a family living in one neighborhood to walk several miles to attend the church where their ancestral language would be spoken.

Nearly every church also had a school, and it was there that immigrant children were taught English and began the American assimilation, Laatsch and Matthies say.

In a recent article for *Voyageur Magazine*, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay historian Andrew Kersten points out that in the 1900 census, more than 20 percent of the residents of Green

Bay were born in another country, with Belgium and Germany leading the way. But there were also 400 Canadians, (including 150 French Canadians), 300 Russians, 200 Irish, 45 blacks, 66 Native Americans and two Chinese.

"These numbers are important," Kersten points out, "because for much of the early 20th century, Green Bay was a place of competing and different cultural traditions, languages, and folkways ... This would not be the last time either."

In recent decades Green Bay has seen the arrival of Hmong immigrants coming from their war-torn homelands in Southeast Asia, and Hispanic families coming to Green Bay for economic opportunity.

To Cornelius, Green Bay's ethnic diversity needs to be valued as source of strength rather than viewed a reason for division. And she sees parallels between the Oneida experience and groups new to Green Bay.

"When I speak to Hmong elders I tell them 'you keep speaking your language,'" Cornelius says. "They're where we were when we first came here."

About the series

"Wisconsin Hometown Stories: Green Bay," an hourlong television show developed by Wisconsin Public Television and the Wisconsin Historical Society, will be televised at 8 p.m. Nov. 12 on WPNE, Channel 38. Before that statewide broadcast there will be a public screening at 2 and 7 p.m. Nov. 7 at the Meyer Theatre in downtown Green Bay. Plans are being developed to make tickets available for the public screening.

The Press-Gazette is collaborating with Wisconsin Public Television and the Wisconsin Historical Society for

the Wisconsin: Hometown Stories project. For information about the Hometown Stories series, go to wisconsinstories.org/greenbay

Some of us have roots in the Green Bay area that are hundreds, even thousands of years old. While others arrived here more recently. Together, they become Our Story. We'd like to hear about you and your ancestor's part in this tale. If you have a story or photos that you would like to share with us, those can be sent to Terry Anderson at tanderso@greenbaypressgazette.com

Chapters in the "Our Story" series

■ **Sept. 17:** The First People
■ **Today: A New Home:**
Immigrant Tales
■ **Oct. 1:** Politics: Statehood to City
■ **Oct. 8:** Cultural Green Bay
■ **Oct. 15:** Agriculture: From

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■ **Oct. 22:** Industry: Tissue Capital of the World
■ **Oct. 29:** Titledown: Home of the Green Bay Packers
■ **Nov. 5:** Your Stories: Readers Remember Green Bay

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